

BRITISH ARCHITECTS.



There is an uncertainty as to the precise year when Gibbs came into the world, but we are inclined to consider it to have been about 1674 or 1675. He was a native of Aberdeen, of respectable lineage, and at the Marischal College received that species of sound education for which our northern countrymen were even at that period remarkable, and in later times have been still more conspicuous. Becoming, by the death of his parents, his own master at an early age, he quitted Scotland to seek in richer lands the initiative step to fortune, and with a predisposition for architectural pursuits, made his way to exercise it in the ready mart for taste or talent which London has always been supposed to offer. The new city had, when Gibbs first saw it, about his twenty-first year, just sprung out of the ashes of the great fire of 1666; St. Paul's was progressing towards completion, and the fifty churches of Sir C. Wren afforded both a fine study and a congenial stimulus to a mind so constituted. He was, however, one of those spirits who are restless in their desire to acquire varied knowledge, and, passing over to the continent, entered there into the practice of the profession, but under whom we are uninformed. It was while so employed in Hol-

land that he attracted the notice of the Earl of Mar, when visiting that country in 1700; this nobleman, interested by the talent and perseverance of the young Scotchman, became at once his patron and friend, recommending him to prosecute his studies at Rome; neither did the earl stop at mere advice, but furnished his *protégé*, over many years, with pecuniary means to cultivate at leisure an acquaintance with the classic styles.

When, about 1710, Gibbs made his re-appearance in London, he did so with singular advantages in his favour. Originally well educated, improved by foreign travel and a long familiarity with ancient examples, he at once started into practice under the auspices of the Earl of Mar, then possessing high court influence, without the ordinary difficulties that usually beset first efforts to establish professional reputation. Wren had already outlived the usual age of man, and Vanbrugh was labouring under unmerited obloquy, and, in contending with the bitter enmity of the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough, was fast losing vantage ground he might otherwise have successfully maintained.

The first building to be placed to the credit account of Gibbs is the quadrangle of King's

College, Cambridge; it is generally considered, particularly the Doric portico, as too diminutive in character, and too much broken up into detail; but we are not to judge him in this summary way; in this instance, he had been required to plan accommodation, of a given description, for the numerous inmates and attendants of a large collegiate establishment, to the exclusion of any attempt at grandeur, which in other respects would have been appropriate to the occasion.

But, whatever may have been the difference of opinion upon the merits of King's College, "she axes had it," and our architect obtained a ready introduction to the commissioners, who still retained the superintendence of church-building in the metropolis, by whom his design for St. Martin's was preferred, and that edifice may be taken as a fair specimen of his ability. The very noble portico, the result of impressions produced by his familiarity with classic models, is generally admired, and we think deservedly so; by hypercritics, it has been designated a servile imitation of the portico of the Roman Pantheon; but, at any rate, he had the boldness, with far less appropriate material, to bring under the eye of his professional brethren an example that might serve good purpose, where little else than imitation is cultivated. The steeple cannot perhaps be considered entirely worthy of the splendid feature just noticed, though, since the church has been relieved from the mass of mean buildings that surrounded it, it must, as a whole, be considered one of the most striking architectural objects to which we have immediate reference. The interior is replete in all the proprieties of art, and in point of accommodation yields to none of the great number of churches of about the same date.

On the subject of this church we have the pleasure to lay before our readers the following original document, which we were favoured with permission to transcribe from the parochial archives by the competent authorities.

The Account between Mr. James Gibbs, Surveyor, and the Commissioners for rebuilding St. Martin's Church.

Mr. GIBBS, Dr.				£	s.	d.
1721.	June 12.	To cash per Mr. Keate, Treasurer	..	100	0	0
	Nov. 7.	To do. per do.	..	66	0	0
1722.	Dec. 21.	To do. per Mr. Drummond, Treasurer	..	100	0	0
		To do. per do.	..	5	10	0
1723.	June 10.	To do. per do.	..	100	0	0
	Dec. 18.	To do. per do.	..	50	0	0
1724.	21.	To do. per do.	..	50	0	0
1725.	Jan. 21.	To do. per Mr. Churchwarden Saucer	..	10	14	6
1727.	June 6.	To do. per Mr. Turner	..	150	0	0
				£632	4	6

Contra. Cr.				£	s.	d.
1721.	Nov. 7.	By model of the church	..	66	0	0
1722.	Dec. 21.	By alterations of do.	..	5	10	0
1725.	June 21.	By the plan for the east window	..	10	14	6
1727.	June 6.	By his trouble as surveyor to the church for six years	..	550	0	0
				£632	4	6

I do allow and approve of the above amount; and do acknowledge to have received of and from the Commissioners appointed by Act of Parliament to rebuild St. Martin's Church, by the hands of the above Mr. Turner, the sum of One Hundred and Fifty Pounds, in full of all debts, claims, dues, and demands whatsoever, as Surveyor to said Church, Vestry-room, and Tabernacle, and for all Draughts and Plans by me done for the said Commissioners and Parish.

Witness my hand, this Sixth Day of June, 1727. -

JAS. GIBBS.

Witness hereunto,

WILLIAM HEAD.

JAS. JEPSON, Clerk to Commissioners.

An account of this description seldom gains publicity, and it is highly interesting, as shewing the rate of remuneration at which men of eminence were willing 126 years since to devote their abilities and services to public works.

The total cost of building St. Martin's church was thirty thousand pounds; of the interior fittings, bells, and organ, eighteen thousand pounds: the dates of its commencement and completion are fully set forth in the account.

We next find him engaged upon the church of St. Mary-le-Strand, a structure certainly inferior to St. Martin's; but we must also recollect that the architect, in thus occupying the greater part of a public thoroughfare, was cramped in his plans; St. Mary's therefore falls short in the character best befitting such an edifice; it is too much broken up, and encumbered to excess with mouldings, architraves, and ornaments. The spire, to us, is a pleasing object, and composed, as it is, of successive tiers, after the Roman manner, proves the leaning of Gibbs to the particular style which for so long a period he had had before him. In St. Mary's he may be said to have endeavoured to compensate the absence of

grandeur by a redundancy of ornament, the disadvantages of the site operating to produce this result.

About this time (1730), Gibbs was much employed in planning and executing numerous works, which, though of a very useful kind, are not sufficiently important to require particular notice. His next public essay was the Radcliffe Library, Oxford, which, rearing its elevated dome and clustered columns among so many Gothic edifices, enhances by variety the interest which a view of this ancient city never fails to inspire. The Radcliffe Library is remarkable for its cupola of a hundred and forty feet high, surmounting the circular space which contains the valuable collection of literature so called; the interior, nearly one hundred feet in diameter, is universally admitted to display great skill in the arrangement, and appropriateness to the purposes for which it was designed. Gibbs was, both personally and professionally, the favourite architect of both Universities; Cambridge, where he had, as a *debut*, constructed the quadrangle of King's College, recalled him to build her senate-house and Royal Library.

We may not omit to mention that in Westminster Abbey there is an example of his con-

ception and taste in monumental sculpture.—the tomb of Holles, Duke of Newcastle. This performance has met with few admirers; it is perhaps too architectural, and in a style far from assimilating with the surrounding scene. In this tomb he has sought to accomplish the very difficult task of rendering intelligible at a glance the rank, attributes, and transition of the tenant to a state of beatitude, and has failed in the unity and simplicity which the art of sculpture imperatively demands.

Apart from his profession, Gibbs was a man of many acquirements; he had a taste for literature, and was accepted in circles where it is cultivated. Living and dying single, what to so kind a nature was lost of domestic enjoyment, found some compensation in the active career that led to moderate wealth; in his distribution of those goods of fortune, there is a trait that the cold delineations of sculpture would fail to commemorate—his gratitude towards the Earl of Mar. When that nobleman, whether from latent attachment to the house of Stuart, or from real or fancied indignities on the part of the new dynasty, suddenly quitted the precincts of St. James's to head the insurrection in Scotland in 1715, and the single battle of Sheriffmuir decided that there re-